



National Park Service
Big Thicket National Preserve
6044 FM 420
Kountze, Texas 77625
Tel: 409.951.6802

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Contact: Todd Brindle, Superintendent

Environmental Assessment for Providing Administrative Campsites and Recreational Vehicle (RV) Sites at the Field Research Station, Saratoga, Hardin County

The National Park Service (NPS) is conducting an Environmental Assessment (EA) to construct new administrative (non-public) use recreational vehicle (RV) sites and provide a group camping area for volunteer and administrative use at the Field Research Station in Saratoga. The Preserve also proposes to remove concrete foundations, walkways, and other remaining structures belonging to the former school buildings and an old RV site that are on the grounds of the Field Research Station. The new administrative-use group camping area and RV sites would supplement the existing dormitory and administrative facilities at the Field Research Station, and increase the attractiveness of the Preserve to researchers, citizen scientists working for the "Thicket of Diversity" All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI), and potential volunteers interested in seasonal internships.

The EA will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide the decision-making framework that 1) explores a reasonable range of alternatives to meet project objectives, 2) evaluates potential issues and impacts to park resources and values, and 3) identifies mitigation measures to lessen the degree or extent of these impacts.

Consistent with NPS management policies, laws, and other regulations, the objectives of this project are 1) to provide researchers, student groups, and general volunteers with a designated group camping area and RV sites with electrical and water hook-ups while they are doing work for the Preserve, 2) remove old foundations, concrete, and debris from the site to remove risks to human health and safety, and 3) prevent impairment of Preserve resources and limit impacts on Preserve operations and management.

The preliminary range of alternatives for evaluation in the EA are:

Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative. The NPS would continue to manage the Field Research Station to support ecological research and education of the Big Thicket, with no construction of an administrative-use RV site or camping area, and no removal of old foundations or concrete from the former school buildings or grounds.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action. Under the proposed action, the NPS would designate an administrative (non-public) use group camping area, develop and build 2-4 administrative (non-public) use RV sites (pads and roads) with electrical and water hook-ups and a septic holding tank, install 2 waterless vault toilets, and demolish existing structural remnants of the former RV sites, concrete platforms, sidewalks, and foundations at the Field Research Station.

Public Comments

We are currently in the scoping phase of this project, and encourage you to submit your comments at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/bith>. You may also submit written comments to: Superintendent, Big Thicket National Preserve, 6044 FM 420, Kountze, TX 77625, or you may hand deliver written comments to Big Thicket National Preserve. **Comments are due by April 30, 2009.** You will have another opportunity to comment when the EA is released for public review.